15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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CHAPTER SIX

From Hand to Mouth

22 Aborigines have lived from hand to mouth for centuries, but it is a wonder that any human being can live in Arnhem Land and find enough to eat. Though the Reserve covers 34,000 square miles, an average white man would perish in it if he were not rescued by a Stone Age man. On the other hand an aboriginal family, isolated many miles from its hunting-grounds, can calmly grind hardwood into hunting spears and digging-sticks, make fire by twirling one stick against another, find water, erect a shelter to suit the weather conditions, and make a comfortable camp.

22 732 Iniji, an aboriginal boy of eleven years, was inadvertently abandoned on a barren island near Yirrkala when his horde divided forces and went away in their canoes. Iniji was deformed and had difficulty in hobbling, yet he kept himself alive for over a month by crawling along the beach for turtle eggs and shellfish. For moisture he manipulated [312] long grass straws far under a low cliff face and sucked the only fresh water on the island.

262 Contrary to popular belief, aboriginal foods are mainly of vegetable origin, although they also eat animals, birds, fish, and reptiles. For countless centuries, Stone Age hunters have tested roots, yams, berries, animals, birds, fish, reptiles, and shellfish, and numerous deaths have resulted from poisoning, yet they have perfected methods of treatment. [147] They have also evolved an astonishingly efficient digestive system, and also jaws and teeth that bend wire and small iron bars into spears, and nails into fish-hooks.

Most of the forty varieties of yams found in the Reserve